



Inspirational Health Stories

Maria Aguon from San Diego, California - Why Is Maria Smiling?

Maria Aguon has every reason to be smiling. At 83 years of age, she is as active and as healthy as ever. I am fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to hear Maria's personal story and am excited to share it with others during Older American's Month. Reading her story really does not do justice to the warm heart behind the beaming grin. She truly is an amazing individual who has taken the necessary steps to lead a healthier lifestyle.

Maria was born in Guam and raised on her father's farm. Growing up during World War II, she described how her family lived off the land eating native fruits and vegetables. At a young age she developed a fondness for potatoes, yams, and bananas. At the time, she did not realize that these fruits would provide the vital nutrients she needed to become a healthy young woman. After a few years time, Maria moved to San Diego with her new husband, who was a serviceman in the United States Navy. Maria continues to reside there today.

At the age of 79, Maria was living with her daughter when she first "started wellness," as she calls it. Maria is describing a program at the Navy Medical Center in San Diego with the Health Promotion Department that benefits retired Navy servicemen and women and their beneficiaries. The Senior Wellness Program is a thirteen-week program that combines exercise as well as informative health and fitness lectures. Maria values the program so much that she has been involved in the program for four years and continues to come back each new session.

The Senior Wellness Program includes a comprehensive senior fitness assessment administered at the beginning and upon completion of the program. The assessment includes a battery of six test items that measure the physical abilities needed to remain active and independent in later years. Maria is one of the older adults that have seen significant gains in the six areas of testing. Maria received the score of 19 in the chair stand test, where the normal range for a functional fitness level is 14. Revealing her above-average lower body strength when compared to other older adults in her age and gender group. She also scored above average for the number of steps she completed in a timed two-minute step test. Her ability to continue

to advance in physical capabilities including flexibility and aerobic endurance is astounding.

She is extremely active outside of the program as well, walking almost two hour a day. She has also participated in various philanthropic walks throughout the community of San Diego, including the walk for the fight against breast cancer and the MS walk. Maria also stretches every morning and enjoys dancing whenever she has the opportunity to do so. Participation in these activities "clears her mind and relieves her stress," according to Maria.

When I asked Maria about what makes her such a beautiful person inside and out, she informed me that her "positive attitude, exercising and eating healthy food" can be attributed to her cheery disposition. She told me that she always smiles and just minds her own business. This is some useful advice that we can all use from time to time. Maria also recommends her favorite breakfast dishes: oatmeal with peaches or a smoothie made with fresh strawberries and bananas. She consumes over five fruits and vegetables a day and because of the knowledge she has gained through the Senior Wellness Program she knows that this is vital to her health. Maria has every reason to smile because she is happy and healthy!